

Travels Through Kentucky History
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In what is commonly referred to as the “good old days”, politicians would climb aboard a flatbed truck decorated with red, white and blue bunting and would deliver the kind of rousing campaign speeches that would send the crowd into torrents of either festive hurrahs or surly boos and hisses. That tradition has died in most of the country. But not in the tiny western Kentucky crossroads town of Fancy Farm, which comes alive with an old-fashioned political picnic on the first Saturday in August.

Thousands of people swarm into this otherwise indistinguishable community to gorge themselves on famous Fancy Farm pit barbecue, play a round of bingo, and buy homemade quilts. Then the assemblage gathers to hear politicians deliver their best old-time, grass-roots oratory.

No one knows exactly when the first Fancy Farm picnic was held. Some of the older members of St. Jerome Catholic Church, the sponsor of the event, can remember political picnics as far back as 1880. And for all practical purposes, that’s considered to be the year of the birth of the Fancy Farm rally.

The date of the picnic has been changed since that first one nearly 100 years ago. In the beginning, the overwhelmingly Democratic crowds gathered at Fancy Farm on the last Wednesday in July. It was the final opportunity the candidates had to meet face-to-face before the August primary.

When the primary was changed to May, the planners of the picnic rescheduled their event for the first Saturday in August, and Fancy Farm became the fall campaign kick-off for the November elections. While other political picnics have fallen victim to the on-the-spot newspaper and television coverage, Fancy Farm lives on as a symbol of bygone era of personal but fiery politics.